

Linda Clair
Four-and-a-half-day Meditation Retreat
Cold Ash Retreat Centre, Newbury, UK
13 – 17 November 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 1b – Wednesday afternoon discussion

Question: What is this method heading towards? What should we be noticing?

Linda: Everything. Just watch what's arising and then come back to your body, particularly the breath in the abdomen. So try not to focus on the breath. In some ways it's easier to focus on something and that's what we tend to do, but if you *focus* on something that excludes other things. So what the awareness of the breath is doing is stabilising you so you can see as much as possible without being destabilised. So the breath is an anchor and it keeps you in your body, but a lot of other things will arise, a lot of resistance that will appear in different forms. But being in the body – being anchored in the body – will stabilise you.

So this is basic Zen practice and what it's designed for, and what it tends to lead to, is enlightenment. And that's what it was designed for. So I would suggest for everyone during the next few days try not to separate the sitting and non-sitting. Whatever you're doing be in the body. And that's one of the advantages of keeping silent – you tend to do that, to really watch what's going on. Whether you're formally sitting like this, eating your breakfast, in the shower, walking to your room – use everything as a practice.

Question: What is enlightenment?

Linda: Well, I would define it as freedom from fear, freedom from suffering, a state of absence of fear. And that's the only way I can describe it really, the absence of something – not as the presence of anything – because it's something that you've never really felt before. If there's still some degree of fear there, to a degree you're in the past, whereas I'd say the point of enlightenment is the point where the mind subsides. It's still there but it can never really take you over again. And from that point on, in my experience, it deepens and you become more and more established in this state and the mind does become weaker and weaker and weaker. But the point of enlightenment I would say is the point where the mind gives up.

You still need to keep an eye on it, you still need to be grounded, and if you do that it can never take over again. So there's still a shadow of fear there, but relatively hardly anything. And at that point the whole body softens, ninety-nine per cent of the tension leaves the body. The tension of holding this person together, how we think we should behave, the incredible self-consciousness that I know I felt, that really motivated me to do this. And you're just simply here. And there's no desire to be anywhere else.

Question: Thank you. Sounds good.

Linda: It is.

Question: You said lots of resistances will come up. Can you say more about the resistances? I'm guessing one is my mind not shutting up?

Linda: Resistance – well, resistance is very necessary. We tend to think if the resistance wasn't there we'd be enlightened, we'd be here. In a way that is true but the resistance is also very necessary because it acts – like on a vehicle when you've got something that stops it from going too fast, a governor. So the resistance does do that, it stops too much energy coming in all at once. And what you need to do is really look at how you deal with the resistance, and that's a big part of this practice. So if you resist the resistance and say, "The resistance is what is in the way," that's what will happen. But if you can accept that the resistance is necessary and just feel it, be with it, accept it to a degree but don't give in completely to it, it can be very valuable.

So it will come up in different forms. Probably everyone so far has felt, "What am I doing here? I don't want to be here. I want to escape and go home – this is a waste of time." It can come up as pain in the body, tension in the body, and that is when there is energy coming into the body and it's meeting blocks of resistance in the body. So with this practice the way to deal with that is to sit with it, and be as still as possible and feel it, and not try and push through it but just sit with it.

Question: So acceptance is what I'm hearing, noticing and accepting whatever is.

Linda: Yes. So that's a difficult thing to do and my teacher in Japan said – the most profound thing he said to me was – "Accept everything." And if you apply that to *every little thing* you start to see what a profound statement that is. Accepting everything, not regretting anything, not saying, "I shouldn't be thinking about this, I shouldn't have done that, I should have done that," or "I shouldn't have said this," or, "I should have said this." But just completely accepting that everything that has ever happened in your life, that you've ever done, has been necessary and not regretting anything. Maybe not repeating certain things, and that's what experience is for.

Question: A couple of times I thought I'd fall over, like dropping off to sleep, I fell back. I don't understand it. Am I just sleeping?

Linda: It can happen. So you don't think you were sleeping?

Question: Somewhere in between – just really dopey.

Linda: So that can happen, and it often happens, where there's this state almost like a twilight state, like just before you go to sleep, where you feel deeply relaxed. And there is the tendency to fall asleep but it's not quite happening, and it's actually quite a deep state. It can often happen, particularly at the beginning of a retreat, but it might happen off and on. So it's a state of deep relaxation. But when you're sitting and alert it's a bit different to when you're lying down. And if you were lying down you'd probably fall asleep when that happened, but this is a bit different. So when that happens just watch it and do your best to stay alert, but if you do fall asleep it's no big deal. Breathe into the belly and that will stabilise you to a degree. Be very aware of your posture because if you are quite straight it can really help you stay more alert. Just watch what happens. It will come and go, lots of things will come and go.

Question: I was starting to beat myself up for not taking this seriously and all that going on.

Linda: So if you're unsure about things like that, particularly if you're beating yourself up about it, ask about it. Lots of things will happen. Try not to judge your meditation. It's easy to say but of course that's why we're here really, because we're sick of judging ourselves and everyone else. But try not to judge your meditation. We tend to put a lot of importance on what happens when we're sitting and go, "I should be feeling this, I should be in a certain state, and if that's not happening I'm not meditating properly." But the main thing is that you're here and you're sitting. Of course you make the effort to come back to your body and keep coming back again and again. But it will keep changing and it's not so important what's happening during the sit. You'll feel the effects of this afterwards. We get very used to wanting immediate results – "I do this and this should happen." But this is different.

Question: Accept what is, accept it?

Linda: Yes, whatever is happening accept it, come back to your body.

Question: I was doing watching and that same old same old was in there doing whatever it is that it does.

Linda: You mean your mind?

Question: Yes, probably looking for some kind of experience. But at the same time realising that an experience is just something that comes and goes. And then it occurred to me that it's an ongoing thing that says it knows something. And then it occurred to me that perhaps that is the thing: it always says it knows something, it knows this moment. It seems to have this ongoing idea that it knows whatever it is that's happening. I got clued in that that's also the next thought, and that without that idea, without that, when that thing is looked at to say, "Well, what does it know?" Does any of that make sense at all?

Linda: I think I know what you're saying but don't get too caught up in that. See that and realise that – that the mind is all about knowing, that's what thinking is. "I know this, I know that, try to know what's going to happen." And you think by knowing that you feel secure, if you know something that is your security. But the only security lies in the unknown. But to get to the unknown you really need to use your body.

So you realise something like that, that is really profound, but don't get caught into the trap of wanting to know more about it and wanting to know what that realisation is. Let it go and then simplify it. As soon as you start to see yourself analysing something like that cut it and come back to your breath, just come back to your body. Really simplify it. So you'll have lots of realisations, deeper and deeper realisations, and one of the main things to do is not to get too caught up in the realisation. Because you'll spend the rest of the sitting, and sometimes the rest of your life, trying to make sense of that realisation. And it won't make sense and that will actually dilute the whole thing. So if you can realise something like that, that can almost not be put into words, try and put it into words when you're speaking to me if you like, and then let it go. That will actually make it a much deeper realisation.

Because what the fear is is that you're going to forget it. "I'm going to forget this realisation. I've realised this thing and I have to keep thinking about it and that will make it a deeper and fuller." But

it will do the opposite. So it's very difficult to drop something like that but it's very important to do that if you want to keep going more deeply into this. Your body will remember whatever it needs to remember. And that's what a realisation is – it's something more real and you'll feel it in your body and take it in, but you don't need to remember it intellectually with your mind. You don't really need to know anything.

So we're not practicing trying to forget anything but we're practicing trying not to remember things all the time, not to store anything else in our head. We're purifying the brain and the more space there is there the deeper the realisation and the more here you are. So if in doubt come back to your body. But it's very difficult to do that when you get very excited about something. And sometimes it's good to just express it and that also allows you to let it go.

Question: So all thoughts qualify as resistance?

Linda: Yes, every thought is of your past. It's a movement away from now. Doesn't matter what the thought is. We tend to see the subject of our thoughts as the important thing but it's really the thinking. So what we're looking at is not the thoughts but that movement which is thinking. And it goes so quickly that we don't see the thinking, we see the thought, the actual subject, rather than the movement. So as we become more grounded in the body the consciousness starts to quicken and we start to be able to see that movement more clearly, particularly if you're sitting still for periods.

At first it feels like it's so fast that you've got no hope of ever catching thinking. But gradually gradually, particularly when you're doing something like this, which is a concentrated period of sitting, you do start to see that it is possible to occasionally see that movement away and come back. And each time you realise you're thinking you've actually caught up with it and then you come back. It doesn't matter how many times. And often if you're doing it quite quickly it means that your consciousness has actually quickened and you're vibrating at a very fast speed.

Thinking is a movement in time. It creates this illusion that time exists. And you could see time as this horizontal line, you could see now as this vertical line, which is still moving but not in a lateral direction, not in a time-based direction. So each time you move away from where you are – say you're sitting here – and each time you think you're actually moving away. Whichever direction you see it in it's always of the past, something that's already happened to you, because you can't think of the unknown. You can try and predict what's going to happen but really you can't think about it. So as soon as you start to move away you're actually moving out of your body into this time-based delusion where you think that there is a past and a future. You're never actually here when you're thinking but you're always in your own personal past, you're always going back and forth.

And occasionally – plop – you're here. And that can be very attractive but usually it's very difficult to stay here for very long. So what we're doing here is practicing being here for longer periods, because it takes a lot of energy, a different form of energy to thinking. Thinking takes energy but it doesn't regenerate energy it just keeps sucking energy from you, whereas when you're here and not thinking the energy is moving and regenerating and becoming stronger and stronger and faster and faster. Whereas thinking, eventually you see, is really quite cumbersome.

So enlightenment is the point where you're reasonably established in this state. And then as it goes on you become more and more firmly established and keep speeding up more and more until it's

almost impossible to think, there is just no desire to think. And that's what this is all about – getting to the source of the desire to think. It's not saying, "I'm going to stop thinking." That's just a very surface-based band-aide. This is something much, much deeper. And it does take time, but it's almost like you're going back in time rather than trying to create more time, to create a future.

Question: I usually have fear at this idea that if I put my energy into spiritual development I'm fulfilling my soul's purpose so the universe is going to support what I'm doing. I cannot tell you the number of hurdles I've had to overcome just to be here. I was petrified as well because this is probably the toughest thing I've ever done; it is the toughest thing I've ever done, these four and a half days. But I was dismayed – I hired a car and the first thing I did was crash it. It just kept on going like that. Anyway it all fell into place in the end and I'm here.

Linda: Well, I'm so glad you're here. And a couple of people didn't make it. I think probably fear had something to do with it, and most people feel that before a retreat. It's an unconscious fear. It's not like you really don't want to come; you want to come but it's almost like all these things get in the way and it tests you.

Question: Well I really, really wanted to come. I don't know if you'd remember this but at Oxford I was the most outspoken in trying to get you to come back. And when the email was sent out to say that bookings are open I hadn't checked my emails for a couple of days and when I did check them it was booked up. And I thought I just can't not be in this group, so I was cheeky and I went on the Australian website and paid and they accepted my booking. But I just felt my place is here, I have to be here. But that didn't mean it didn't terrify me. In a way I think it's a good thing because it's almost like I'm sensing the depth of the ego or something. So it's a good indicator.

Linda: Thank you, and I'm glad you're here.

Question: I'm starting to beat myself up for taking up too much space and time. I've never been to this sort of sit before but I bought some books with me. Should I not even do that, or should I just leave them aside and stay in?

Linda: Just leave them. Don't bother reading during this. If you really want to read something just read something banal, like a thriller or a fiction, to help you sleep but don't bother reading any spiritual books.

Question: What about going for a run? I don't want to distract myself.

Linda: No, go for a run. But in the mornings we're having yoga here.